

Christine Vasquez, paternal aunt to Adam Vasquez

When I thought I was going to speak a couple of weeks ago, I hurriedly wrote down whatever came into my mind about this entire case. I ended up with five hand-written pages of everything I felt. I felt myself getting angrier with each page, and I knew I had to take a step back. I had to remind myself that this is an Impact Statement. So I had to stop and concentrate on how this entire situation has impacted me.

Was Adam my only niece or nephew that has passed away? No. I've lost several In fact.

Was Adam the youngest niece or nephew I have lost? No.

Was Adam the only niece or nephew that was killed by the hands of someone else? No. Actually we lost another nephew in Oregon a year-and-a-half ago, and that trial is supposed to start later this year.

Honestly I can name all of my nieces and nephews that have passed on. Because I have so many nieces and nephews, admittedly I have to look up their dates of birth and the years of their deaths. I can't remember any of the dates off the top of my head.

But Adam, Adam has been different since I first received the phone call. It was 6:00 p.m. on Friday July 24th, 2015. I received a call from my sister, who lived in Dinuba, who explained that her then daughter-in-law let her know about a rumor going around the Porterville area that Adam wasn't breathing and was taken to the hospital. He was then transferred to Valley Children's Hospital but he didn't make it. I couldn't speak, I almost couldn't breathe. He was only 2 ½ years old. At that point, I had not heard from anyone in our family about this. I didn't know who to call to verify whether or not this rumor was true. I couldn't call my husband's brother, Adam's grandfather Ysabel; he had lost his only son two years before. He would have fallen apart.

So I ended up calling my niece, Tina. Any time Tina would speak about Adam, she always called him "my baby". If anything had happened to Adam, I figured Tina would know. When I called her, she immediately became so upset that she hung up the phone. Her daughter called me back to ask what happened because poor Tina couldn't even speak about it. I explained to her what I had heard and I also said I didn't know who to call to try to verify any of this.

I guess they ended up calling Tina's sister, Gina. By this time Gina had spoken with the maternal grandmother who verified Adam's death. Mind you Adam was taken to the hospital and then transferred to Valley Children's Hospital in the early morning hours of July 24th. Adam was declared deceased at 12:34 p.m. I received my phone call at 6:00 p.m. All day has passed during which no one reached out to our family about what happened with Adam, not to Tina or to Adam's paternal grandfather.

I lost it at the funeral. All I could think about was that poor little guy should be playing with toys, running after his brothers, smiling, giggling, getting to know all of his cousins, doing little boy stuff. He shouldn't have been placed in a box, being lowered into the ground. I've lost a nephew at 12 ½ years old but his death was due to disabilities he was born with. And I lost another nephew who didn't make it to full term before he passed. As much as those deaths hurt, Adam's death was different. This has been an unbearable pain.

I am a mother, a grandmother, and thanks to a bonus grandson, I am a great-grandmother. I have always believed young children should strive to make their lives better than the generation before. To learn from our good deeds and go beyond, or to learn from our mistakes so they don't make the same ones. Adam's life was not easy, but you couldn't tell that from his smile. His smile lit up his whole face, and it was sure contagious. It made you smile just looking at his little face.

As I have previously said in court, Adam was only 6 months old when his dad Abel lost his life. Children are not asked to be brought into this world but sometimes pay the price for the decisions of the surviving parent, including having to deal with a new adult that may come into the home.

This defendant came into a home where Adam and his two brothers lived. This is a life-changing event and any adult who moves in with a woman with children should understand the huge responsibility involved. But this defendant chose a life of drugs, chose a life where his wants were the main focus, not those of the children. His erratic behavior, a behavior that no one intervened with for the safety of those poor boys, caused Adam's death.

I have chosen to call this person Defendant, not a man. A true man doesn't beat a 2 ½ year old to death. A true man doesn't punch a poor defenseless child in the stomach with such force that his intestines were ruptured and the inside of his back bruised. A true man keeps his anger in check and stays away from innocent children when he feels his behavior is becoming out of control. And a true man owns up to his mistakes, his errors, his sins. He doesn't just cop-out with "No Contest". Even given the opportunity, this Defendant couldn't give Adam the justice that poor little baby deserves.

I was doing face-time with my son and grandson. My grandson is 3 years old. And while talking to him I realized that little Albert is older than Adam ever would be. These kids should be playing together the way their dads did when they were small. I can't tell you how many times Abel spent the weekend at our house playing with my boys, and we would take him to the boys' soccer games or little league games. And now their children will not only never play together, they will never meet on this earth simply because of this Defendant.

I have been fortunate enough to have 21 years of civil law behind me, seven of those years spent in the domestic violence unit of the local legal aid office. I've typed declarations of clients about the abuse they had endured, I've seen their black eyes, bandaged faces, bruises. It has taken every bit of those years of experience to get me through this case. I have tried my best to remain strong for my family because I wanted to be there for them to help them through this tragedy. But at night, Adam's face comes to me, his smile, seeing him run after his brothers and his cousins like I did the last time I saw him. And in my dreams, he's running around and playing and then he stops and looks at me and asks me "Why Tia? Why did he hit me?" I have no answer to tell him. How do I answer him?

Since the sentencing agreement was first told to me, I have had such a difficult time going to his memorial that our family has for him. Previously I would talk to him and tell him "Don't worry baby. We're seeking the death penalty. He's not going to get away with doing this to you. We'll see justice soon baby." But how do I tell him that this Defendant is someday going to walk out of prison, free. But we, the Vasquez Family, aren't free. We are left to our own dreams that become our prisons with the same nightmare ending, that Adam isn't coming back.

Throughout all of this court process, the defendant walks into the court, almost struts in, smiles and acknowledges his family, a nonchalant demeanor during the proceedings. What we don't see is remorse, sadness over what he did to Adam. Like he was only arrested for a simple burglary or a speeding ticket. Not the look of someone who willingly killed a baby.

We have always been very family-oriented, from singing Christmas carols until midnight waiting for Santa to come, to cracking confetti eggs on everyone's head at Easter, to fighting for Grandma Trine's homemade tortillas. But our family has a hole in its heart; it's Adam, it's what his loss means to us. His smile that could light up a room and now things have been left very dark. And it's in that darkness that I see him and I'm still trying to answer his question, "Why?".

Your Honor,

I stand here before you today as an Aunt and as the voice of a young life tragically and abruptly silenced - a life cut cruelly short. I am here in representation of a life that was extinguished far too soon; A life that was robbed of its potential to grow, learn, and love. This was the life of my two-year-old nephew, Baby A. The grief, loss, anger, sadness, and overwhelming weight of a loss so profound is hard to put into words.

He was a mere two years of age; The age when life is but a series of discoveries, from the simplest joys of a new toy to the wonders of the world outside. At this age trust and love are given freely, the world is viewed with innocent eyes full of curiosity and the excitement of experiencing new things is so precious to see and experience with a child. At this young age is when my nephew's life was brutally and prematurely taken away from the world and his family.

It has been eight years since that dreadful day. Eight years of enduring a hole in our family. Eight years of tears, sleepless nights, and a pain that refuses to diminish. His absence is felt in every family gathering, whether it be a simple meal together as a family or a celebration. For eight years we have been caught in a limbo between our need for justice and the painful reality of our loss. Eight years of milestones Baby A never got to reach. Eight years of laughter and love we never got to share. We live with the shadow of his loss and the shadow of this horrific act in every quiet moment spent alone; it is a pain that will always be there.

The disrespectful coward who stands before us has arrived at every court appearance not displaying any sort of remorse or the slightest ounce of empathy, but rather with a patronizing smirk and carefree laughter acting like this is all a joke. The people who cared for Baby A and are still grieving for his loss to this day have sat at every judicial proceeding and had to endure this murderer's disrespectfulness, which has only furthered our anguish over the past eight years. This pathetic excuse of a human has sat in this court and admitted to his guilt of first-degree murder among other charges with his guilty plea. His admission of guilt cannot bring back the laughter that once filled our lives, it cannot heal the wounds that still run deep in our hearts and most of all it cannot fill the void that my nephew's absence has left in all of us. Though we cannot bring him back, we can honor his memory by cherishing the moments we did share with him and keeping his spirit alive in our hearts. It is our hope that his precious young life was not taken in vain and that his loss might somehow lead to greater awareness and prevention of such unthinkable acts.

After almost a decade, we are finally at the point of receiving justice, so we can finally begin proper mourning. Your Honor, while you may hear me say we are receiving justice, I want you to know I stand before you with an extreme feeling that the punishment being delivered for the horrendous murder of our beloved Baby A is still not enough. Baby A was exactly that, just a baby. I want the magnitude of the defendant's actions against a truly defenseless baby to be recognized by everyone in this room, but out of respect for my family I will do my best to censor and only share a fraction of the dozens of torturous acts committed by the defendant. The medical report stated the injuries inflicted on Baby A were so severe they could be

consistent with full body trauma from a car accident at 80 MPH or falling from a three-story building. It sickens me that these severe injuries that the medical examiner said were consistent with a car accident or fall were not caused by that, but were instead inflicted on my poor innocent, and helpless nephew by the child killer here with us today who has the audacity to call himself a man. Baby A had internal bleeding, bruised organs and ruptured intestines, as well as external bruises and bites from his poor little head to his tiny baby feet, which makes me wonder how long or how often abuse was inflicted upon Baby A. How hard did this monster kick and punch our baby to cause his stomach to touch his backbone? This is just a tiny glimpse into the hurt and pain that was endured by Baby A. I do my best to cope by telling myself his life ended after the first punch so he didn't feel the pain of every injury, but sadly that just isn't the case. His last breath was taken in the hospital as the doctors tried to save his life, which means he felt it all and fought to the very end. It makes me sick to even think of it. I would not wish upon any of you to see the horrendous things I see when I close my eyes knowing all that my precious, innocent baby nephew had to endure at the hands of the monster in this room with us today.

Was my poor nephew crying for his mom, was he looking her in the eyes as you punched him over and over again, was he crying for the torturous pain to stop, or had he cried so hard and for so long that his little voice was no longer capable of uttering a sound? How could an innocent baby, all of two years old, defend himself against the murderous and violent rage that was brought down upon him? These are the things I think of daily that sadden and enrage me especially knowing that the truly deserved punishment is not being given. We have had 50 court dates and 8 trial dates set and vacated over the past nearly 8 years. Because of all of these continuances and vacated trial dates, we have no choice but to accept the plea deal he has been given although we do not feel it is even close to a fair punishment. Someone who can inflict this many injuries upon a baby with no remorse deserves nothing less than the death penalty. The only time he should leave prison is in a body bag. He does not deserve the hope of parole and a future life outside of prison. Since the death penalty has been taken away as an option the next best thing would be solitary confinement with just 1 hour a day out of a cell. The life he lives in prison should be as limited and excruciating as is allowed. Some would call that cruel but the suffering it would cause him does not even come close to the suffering he put an innocent baby through. Baby A was murdered and had his future life violently stolen from him. Why should the scum who stole the life of a baby be allowed any comfort within prison walls or any hope of a future life outside prison?

While up until now I have been focused on the details of the horrendous abuse that ended in murder, I would like to speak of Baby A as I remember him. Every life has a unique story and Baby A is no exception. His existence meant something, he was not just a victim. He was the world to me, especially after tragically losing my brother, his father. Baby A was a comforting connection to my brother that I cherished. I could look at Baby A and see my brother in his eyes, in his movements, in his spirit. He had lost his father as a baby but loved to look at pictures of him and listen to old voicemails with me. He was going to know his father even if he couldn't be there in person with him. He was a beacon of light for me in a period of darkness and I like to think I was that for him as well. His favorite color was green. He loved trucks.

French fries and Goldfish, or as he called them "fishy crackers", were his favorite snack. He loved to walk around with a snack in one hand and a Capri Sun in the other. Sadly my nephew's story ended abruptly before it could truly begin. I often wonder what his life would be like if he were here today. He would be 10 and in the 4th grade. At the age of 10, would he be riding bikes, playing sports with friends and never wanting to be home, or would he still enjoy spending time with his large and loving family? Would we be going to school assemblies for student of the month and honor roll? At the school Christmas program would he be the shy kid hiding in the back or the star of the show? Would he look like my brother, or maybe sound like him? Would he be pestering his siblings like any normal younger brother would, or would they be best friends and always by each other's side? Would he have a girlfriend and want to go to prom or would he be the kind of guy who was "too cool" for school dances? Would he want a wife and babies of his own? It is a story that will never be told, a life that will never be lived. This is the harsh reality of this crime; not just an act of murder but the theft of a future and the silencing of a voice that never had a chance to be heard.

So, Your Honor, as you consider the gravity of this crime, the depth of our loss, and the extent of our suffering, I ask that you remember my 2-year-old nephew and the life he could have lived. This poor baby was failed by multiple people on multiple occasions, which has ultimately led us to this point. His mother should have protected him. The state child welfare system which removed him from and then returned him to his mother's care just two weeks before this tragic day should have protected him. And lastly, this so-called "caretaker" turned murderer should have protected him but instead chose to harm him. In the end, on that fateful day, no one was there to stop this senseless act of violence. Baby A deserved more, he deserved better. Think of the joy he could have brought into this world. Remember the life that Baby A has had stolen from him by a monster with no regard for human life. In your hands, Your Honor, lies the responsibility to affirm that the life of Baby A, and all children, are just as precious as they are priceless and that the taking of such an innocent life will not be tolerated. 20 years from now when this lowlife is up for parole, please consider the fact that parole would allow him to walk and breathe freely, while my nephew will never get to walk or breathe again because of his actions.

As I close, I wonder will the defendant still be laughing as he boards the bus to prison as he often did in court? Will he still be smiling as he meets his first cell mate when they lock him in his prison cell? Will he ever realize how evil he truly is and the gravity of his actions? Will he ever stop laughing and truly accept that he is responsible for the loss of the precious life of Baby A? I pray that one day he truly accepts responsibility and when he lays in his cell at night with his eyes closed he sees Baby A's face, feels every ounce of the pain he caused and hears every agonizing scream and cry for help. I hope Baby A's face and those screams haunt his dreams as they have mine for the last 8 years.

Finally, as I leave here today I can smile because some sort of justice has been served. I still would like to reiterate that this is not the form of justice I was hoping for but at least now, I will be the one that gets to laugh knowing the environment of his forever home where he will be known as a child killer. I will make sure to be at every parole hearing to remind everyone of the

evil acts the defendant has committed because a monster like him does not deserve anything but prison walls. Nothing justifies the torture of a child. To try to use a bad childhood as an excuse for growing up into an adult and murdering a defenseless baby's life is just asinine. The MRI's and brain scans requested 7 years into this drawn out trial seemed like a pathetic last chance effort to come up with an excuse for his actions. There isn't now and never will be an excuse or reason that can be given that will give my nephew his life back and I will make it my life's mission to ensure the defendant will never get his life of freedom back. My final little bit of peace at the end of this all is knowing that while behind prison walls the defendant can never hurt another child again.

Thank you for giving me the chance to speak on behalf of my nephew. His life may have been short, but his impact was profound and his memory will live on in our hearts forever.